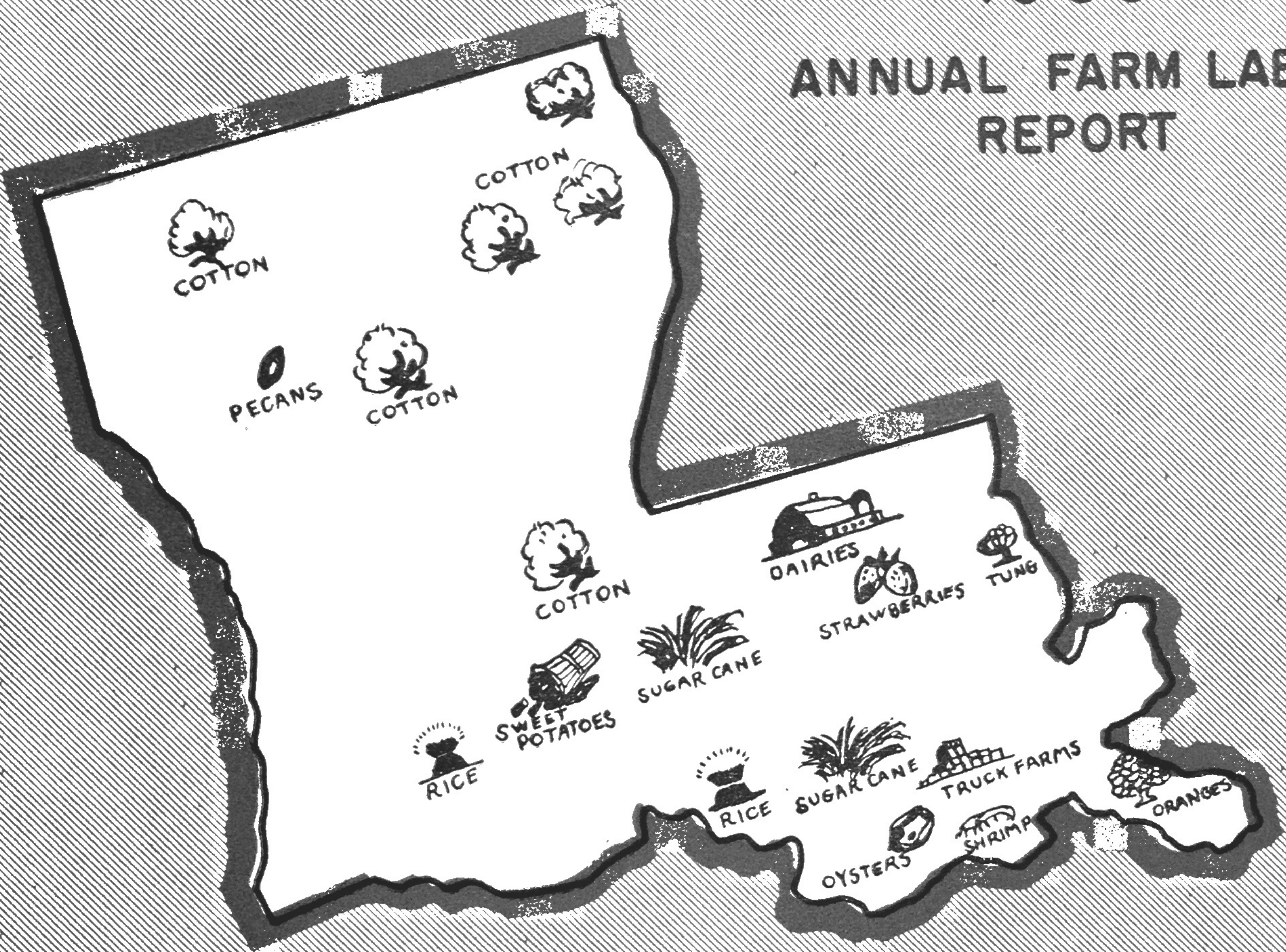


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LOUISIANA

1953

ANNUAL FARM LABOR REPORT



LOUISIANA DIVISION OF EMPLOYMENT SECURITY
J. HADLEY HEARD — ADMINISTRATOR

13223

IV. Labor Supply

A. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

The general characteristics of Louisiana's labor supply differ with the various crop activities. Cotton chopping and hoeing is performed, for the most part, by Negro adult females and teenage youths. During the cotton harvest, the work force is about evenly divided among Negro adult males, females, and youths. Because of the strenuous nature of the work, mostly Negro male workers are employed in the harvesting of sugar cane; however, Negro female workers predominate during the planting of cane. As a result of a greater utilization of mechanical devices, the trend in the past two years has been toward the employment of more female workers in the sugar cane harvest. Mostly male adults are employed in the rice harvest. About 90 per cent of the seasonal workers employed in gathering tung nuts are Negro females. A greater proportion of school-age youths are employed in the strawberry harvest than in any other crop activity. These youths can be employed in the strawberry harvest because school vacations are timed to agree with the harvest schedule in the major growing areas, and because the work is not too strenuous for their physical capacities. Food processing plants employ almost exclusively female workers in their seasonal activities.

Reference to Charts 3 and 4 indicates that in 1953 year-round agricultural workers constituted about 85 per cent of the total agricultural labor force at peak agricultural employment in October. While only 15 per cent of the total agricultural workers are seasonal hired workers, most of the Farm Placement Service's time and efforts in the past few years have been directed toward the recruitment and placement of this type worker. This does not mean that year-round workers have been ignored by the Agency. The agricultural labor market fluctuates with the existing state and national economy, and changing patterns in the agricultural picture. In a previous section, it was explained how the demand for agricultural workers has been changing from the year-round to the seasonal type of worker. The Farm Placement Service activities must be geared to meet these changing economic conditions.

The agricultural labor force has been very tight since the end of World War II, and workers have

been mobilized from every possible source for relatively short periods of time. Short-time agricultural workers (or seasonal hired workers) have been secured from many sources not ordinarily employed in agriculture, as housewives, school-age youths, older workers, and unemployed workers such as construction workers and domestics.

A distinctive characteristic of Louisiana agricultural labor supply is its relative immobility—very few workers will migrate to other parts of the State or to other States. Many seasonal hired workers will work in only one crop; and when that crop is completed, they generally retire from the labor force or seek nonagricultural employment. In fact, a considerable number of workers will only work in one activity in the same crop. For instance, some workers will pick cotton, but will not hoe or chop it. As a general rule, agricultural and food processing workers are not interchangeable between the two industries.

B. LOCAL LABOR SUPPLIES

Virtually all tasks performed in agriculture and food processing industries in Louisiana are accomplished by local labor supplies. This does not mean that workers reside and are employed in the same community. Agricultural workers are considered local if they normally reside within everyday commuting distance of their places of employment. Many workers who are referred to as local are transported from their residences to their places of employment from distances of 40 to 60 miles each working day.

During the 1953 season, local labor was used entirely to plant, cultivate, and harvest the rice, sweet potato, and tung nut crops. The remaining crops—cotton, sugar cane, and strawberries—employed mostly local labor with migrants and foreign workers very much in the minority. It will be noted in Table 4 that even at peak of seasonal hired labor employment in October of last year only 6 per cent of the total supply were domestic migrants; 1 per cent were foreign migrants; and 93 per cent were of local origin. Food processing plants employed only local workers throughout the year.

TABLE 4
SEASONAL HIRED LABOR EMPLOYMENT IN LOUISIANA'S
AGRICULTURAL AND FOOD PROCESSING INDUSTRIES IN 1953

Period 1/	Agricultural Employment				Food Processing Employment		
	Total	Domestic		Foreign	Total	Local	Non-Local
		Local	Non-Local				
January.....	1,220	1,200	0	0	1,500	1,500	0
February.....	1,350	1,350	0	0	1,900	1,900	0
March.....	3,325	2,525	800	0	1,950	1,950	0
April.....	5,000	3,500	1,500	0	1,950	1,950	0
May.....	4,700	4,700	0	0	2,150	2,150	0
June.....	15,585	15,060	0	525	1,870	1,870	0
July.....	6,100	6,058	0	42	1,050	1,050	0
August.....	8,877	8,779	75	23	2,650	2,650	0
September.....	22,400	21,671	425	304	3,230	3,230	0
October.....	32,075	29,823	1,781	471	3,060	3,060	0
November.....	27,415	25,260	1,950	205	3,070	3,070	0
December.....	10,735	9,710	1,025	0	2,255	2,255	0

1/ Employment during middle of month.

C. INTRASTATE AND INTERSTATE MIGRANTS

Housing facilities are a major deterrent to intrastate and interstate recruitment of agricultural workers. Much of the housing offered is wholly inadequate to attract reliable migrant labor. In addition, peak employment in producing cotton, which employs most of Louisiana's agricultural labor force, usually coincides with the peak cotton seasons in adjacent states. Cotton growers in adjacent states traditionally pay higher wages than those paid in Louisiana.

Migrant labor is employed primarily in the production of strawberries and sugar cane. The greatest proportion of migrants are employed in the strawberry harvest. Intrastate supplies of labor for the strawberry and sugar cane harvests are recruited from historical supply areas in and around Baton Rouge, Marksville, Alexandria, Opelousas, New Iberia, Crowley, Garyville, Litcher, and LaPlace.

Interstate migrant labor is secured for the strawberry harvest through cooperation with the Missouri, Mississippi, Arkansas, Illinois and Texas State Employment Agencies. These workers migrate to the Louisiana strawberry harvest because they are between periods of agricultural employment. These interstate migrant workers are, for the most part, Negro male workers from Caruthersville and Kenneth, Missouri; Blytheville, Arkansas; and family

groups from Corpus Christi, Harlingen, and Weslaco, Texas. When these workers complete their employment in the strawberry harvest, they usually return home, although some will be diverted to other strawberry harvests in Arkansas, Tennessee, and Kentucky. In 1953, a new source of Negro male and female workers was secured from Cairo, Illinois, for the strawberry harvest.

Most of the migrant workers employed in producing sugar cane are obtained from within the State. Some labor migrates from southern Mississippi, Alabama, and Texas, although many of these migrants are employed in the sugar mills.

In retrospect, it appears that Louisiana is fortunate in that most of the agricultural labor requirements are secured from local sources. Those states that rely heavily on migrant labor supplies encounter serious difficulties in recruiting and placing migrant labor economically; especially this is true when the crop timetable is miscalculated because of inclement weather or when other unforeseen circumstances arise. A case in point is the Louisiana strawberry harvest. Each year, the Louisiana Farm Placement Service expends considerable time and effort in planning for the employment of nonlocal workers for a short duration during the strawberry harvest. Migrant workers often arrive earlier or later than they are needed, and very often they depart from the area when they are most needed. This sort of an operation is not only frustrating, but extremely wasteful in employing manpower and monetary resources.

D. FOREIGN WORKERS

The only foreign workers employed in Louisiana for seasonal agricultural activities during 1953 were legally contracted Mexican nationals. Federal legislation—Public Law 78, 82nd Congress—placed the responsibility for importing Mexican national agricultural workers upon the United States Secretary of Labor, excepting those functions relative to public health and immigration policy. It is the responsibility of the Louisiana Division of Employment Security to certify to the United States Secretary of Labor that a domestic agricultural labor shortage exists within the State before Mexican national workers may be employed on Louisiana farms. It is also necessary for the Louisiana Employment Service to canvass all likely sources in other states for domestic agricultural workers before importation of foreign workers is consummated.

In 1953, it was necessary to import Mexican nationals for employment in cotton hoeing and chopping in June, and again during the cotton harvest in September, October and November. Peak employment of Mexican nationals was in June, when 525 workers were employed. It will be noted in Table 4 that somewhat fewer foreign workers were employed during the cotton harvest than during the cultivating season.

The number of foreign workers employed in the State for seasonal agricultural activities was the smallest post-World War II importation, despite the fact that production records were set in the high manpower requirement crops—production of cotton was larger in 1953 than in the past 15 years, and sugar cane production set a new record. No foreign workers were employed in planting or harvesting of sugar cane, as had been the case in the past few years.



PLANTING RICE BY AIRPLANE

VII. Labor Forecast For Next Season

Total demand for farm labor is expected to very nearly balance the supply of domestic workers available in 1954. The demand for seasonal hired workers is expected to remain at about last year's level; however, fewer year-round workers are expected to be employed on Louisiana farms next season.

The "pull" of farm workers into nonagricultural employment is expected to be at a much slower pace than has been experienced in the past decade. It is an accepted fact that the agricultural labor force varies in an inverse proportion to the level of non-agricultural employment. There is a likelihood that some "push" of farm workers may develop as a result of the trend toward increased mechanization of the major field crops.

Present indications are that Armed Forces inductions and discharges of farm labor should nearly balance each other in the coming year. Although,

past experience has shown that many veterans with agricultural experience do not return to farm work when discharged; therefore, some net loss of farm labor may result from military requirements.

Table 5 indicates that sufficient domestic seasonal labor should be available to produce and harvest next year's crops. It appears at the present time that Louisiana cotton growers will be allocated from 20 to 30 per cent less acreage than last year. For the past several months, larger growers have served notice to many of their share croppers, renters, etc., that they will not have a place for them during the coming season. Many of these workers have found new places of farm employment; other displaced year-round workers have entered the nonagricultural labor force, but they may possibly make themselves available for seasonal agricultural employment during the year.

TABLE 5
EXPECTED EMPLOYMENT IN LOUISIANA OF SEASONAL HIRED
WORKERS IN AGRICULTURE AND FOOD PROCESSING IN 1954

Period 1/	Expected Employment						
	Agricultural			Foreign	Food Processing		
	Total	Domestic			Total	Local	Non-Local
Local		Non-Local					
January	1,395	1,395	0	0	1,245	1,245	0
February	1,505	1,505	0	0	1,515	1,515	0
March	4,540	3,740	800	0	2,215	2,215	0
April	11,940	7,990	3,950	0	2,355	2,355	0
May	21,880	19,380	2,500	0	3,010	3,010	0
June	21,080	21,080	0	0	2,520	2,520	0
July	9,030	9,030	0	0	1,855	1,855	0
August	19,525	19,450	75	0	3,050	3,050	0
September	31,350	31,115	235	0	3,400	3,400	0
October	31,200	29,780	1,420	0	3,340	3,340	0
November	26,205	24,295	1,910	0	3,540	3,540	0
December	15,745	14,450	1,295	0	2,600	2,600	0

1/ Employment during middle of month.

Employment in the sugar cane activities should remain at about last year's level. The sugar cane acreage allocation is from 6 to 8 per cent less than last year. If it could be presumed that the coming year's weather conditions would be as favorable as last year, there probably would be fewer workers employed in the production of sugar cane. Labor estimates are based on usual weather conditions; therefore, it is anticipated that employment in sugar cane production should remain at about last year's level.

Employment in harvesting the strawberry crop is expected to be greater than last year. Present indications are that acreage has increased about 25 per cent over last year. In order to supply sufficient labor, an expansion of day-haul programs is planned. In addition, it is believed that intensive intrastate and interstate recruitment should provide the necessary workers to produce the crop without undue hardship or crop loss.

No significant changes in employment are expected in the rice, sweet potato, or tung nut crops

from the past year. It is believed that employment in food processing will increase over last year. Unfavorable weather conditions last year reduced the number of food processing workers normally employed, especially in seafood processing plants. A sufficient number of local workers, however, are expected to be available to meet employment demands in food processing.

In the past ten years, agricultural labor shortages have been filled by the use of foreign workers from the British West Indies and Mexico. No foreign workers are expected to be employed in agricultural activities during the coming season. Acreage reductions in crops with high manpower requirements, cotton and sugar cane, should obviate the necessity for importations of foreign workers. If spot shortages develop which cannot be satisfied from local supplies of labor, intensive intrastate and interstate recruitment will be set in motion. Acreage reductions, not only within the State, but in adjacent states, should provide sufficient labor to meet local labor shortages, should they develop.